

Ontology 1 -- Paradox Revealed : Genesis 1:1

I would argue that the Book of Genesis is the most important book in the Bible. This might strike the reader as strange, particularly given the fact that this is the twenty-first century, and our modern natural science can be seen to be at variance with the account of the beginnings of the universe provided by that Book. All but the most conservative and literalistic Christians and Jews regard the 'science' of the Book of Genesis as antiquated in the extreme, and do not take the views of creation presented therein to be true in a literal sense. Mainline churches no longer teach that things at the Beginning actually happened the way the Book of Genesis says they did: one believes in that some version of the theory of evolution is a more accurate description of the origin of the animal and human species, and relegates the notions of six-day creation and talking snakes (and the like) to the realm of either primitive scientific attempts or 'mere' mythology. Among highly conservative Christian groups, the idea seems to be largely that one is required by God to put (God-given) reason aside and believe in the literal truth of such primitive science, turning one's back on the evidence to the contrary which sits right in front of one's very nose. The battle in some parts of the United States to teach a version of Creationism ("Intelligent Design") alongside evolutionary science *as science* in the classroom testifies to this fact.

Surprising, then, that I would tell you that, as far as I'm concerned, the Book of Genesis is not only the most important Book in the Bible, but also that it is the very foundation on which the entire rest of the Bible stands. No, I do not believe that the Book of Genesis contains science (though you are, of course, free to believe just that if you are so inclined! I ask only that you open your mind to the very real presence of levels of meaning and of truth beneath the surface of the plain meaning of the text: Holy Scripture speaks to us in many different voices.)

What is so remarkable about the first line of the Genesis creation narrative is precisely this: it suggests a dual nature of our necessary thoughts about the most ultimate truth¹, and refrains from

¹ That is, it shows that our thinking on the subject ends in a necessary paradox, or, as the ancient Greeks would have it, an *aporia*: our attempts to conceive Ultimate Reality lead to the conclusion that each of two mutually

attempting to capture that truth in a concept or a statement. Now, this is precisely what can seem most frustrating – especially to our sophisticated, twenty-first century minds so used to science and to our ability to reduce all that we encounter in experience to storable determinations of our thought. Genesis' refusal simply to tell us what the nature of God is seems a weakness, a failure to know. We might hope that we can do better; we might mistakenly hope that perhaps, in time, science will be able to give us the correct characterization of the nature of Reality, that science and our thoughts will someday 'capture God.' This hope, I contend, is simply to miss the point.

I do not take the Book of Genesis as a treatise on science. But what is, after all, so great about science? To be sure, science is important, and it tells us many wonderful truths about the physical universe, truths that enable us to make advances in technology which vastly improve the quality of our lives on this planet. Science saves our lives, gives us our computers, increases our food production, flies us to the moon and beyond. Science tells us, and continues to tell us more and more, about how the physical universe works. And that's nice. It's good to know how the world works, and to have the means to change the face of that world so as to increase our human possibilities.

Yet there are questions that science cannot answer. Mark me, I am not saying simply that science has not answered certain questions or kinds of questions yet. I am making the bolder (but nonetheless clearly true) statement that there are questions that science can never answer. What kind of questions are these? They are the questions about the ultimate nature of Reality itself. Why can science not answer them? Not because it lacks the relevant information, but rather because in order to operate, science must view the world in purely physical terms: it takes Existence or Reality Itself as given, and can only proceed to study the physical things contained within Reality. Science

exclusive propositions must be true. It is this revelation of paradox that is, I will argue, the most important virtue of the Genesis account: far from a merely contradictory claim, the ontological paradox revealed in Genesis 1:1 shows us something important about God and about the universe we inhabit.

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can tell us how solar systems are formed, and can even account for the processes whereby universes come to be, it can tell us what physical life is, but it can never tell us what Existence Itself is. Science can also never account for the very fact that science *works*. That is, the Principles of Reason and order, as they are comprehended by the human mind and go to comprise a structure of the universe outside the mind – the fact that Order exists and that we can know that order and find it in the world outside ourselves -- is not a matter for science. Science is and must always be the discovery of the order within the world (universe): while it can account by way of brain adaptation for the fact that we human beings have the ability to conceptualize, to recognize the laws of Logic, to reason, it can never, ever tell us how it is that that reason, logic, and those concepts we have have anything at all to do with the world existing outside our heads. Order and regularity are packed right into the universe (we do not live in a realm of unformed Chaos): we can know only that our adapted brains see the order that they do, we cannot hope scientifically to account for the fact that the order we see actually works in the world.

What are the most basic human questions? What do we, when we are teenagers – or earlier or later or at crucial times in our lives – ask ourselves about the world that makes all the difference to us? It is not, I'll bet, the value of pi or questions concerning the molecular structure of a grain of sand. It is, rather, questions such as Who am I? Why am I here? Is this all that I am, is there nothing more? What is the meaning of human life? What is the purpose of my life? How ought I to live? What's it all for? These are the perennial questions of human life. These are the questions and the answers that go to make up the Book of Genesis.

People who believe that all there is to the world, all there is to life, is definable by way of the physical sciences, will say that the perennial human questions are without meaning. We have discovered, they say, that life is nothing more than our physical existence. We are born, we die. No meaning, no purpose, no point. But science has not 'proven' that. Science can never prove that. These people are mistaking the fact that science can only study that which physically exists within reality for the claim that science has proven that only

physical reality is real. But, as we have seen, science can never account for the existence of Existence; it can never reduce Reality as such (Being itself) to a determination of a thing existing physically within Reality. The existence of Order ('Spirit' or "Mind") in reality, and the existence of that Reality which is ordered by Order can never be accounted for in science's terms, for these are the Principles of Being itself, within which the universes of the things studied by the physical sciences abide.

Historically, God has been conceived as Pure Spirit, Mind, Rationality, Order. That which is to be *ordered* by this ordering Power is seen to be Not-God. This understanding of the nature of God is definitive in the Judeo-Christian scheme of things: God is uniquely self-created, utterly immaterial, eternal, Infinite, Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnibenevolent. God is the Author of all that was, is, and ever shall be; He exists outside time and space. He is the Source of all being and, in fact, is the Principle of Being itself.

Many ancient mythologies posit a creative spiritual God or gods who 'find' undifferentiated matter or cosmic 'stuff' -- i.e. substance existing which is neither formed nor ordered, and from this substance other than themselves, fashion the world or universe of finite, material reality. And this only stands to reason, for, try as we might, we are incapable of coherently thinking of any sort of 'making' which does not assume the presence of some material or 'stuff' *out of which* one fashions what is made. In these mythologies, then, the divine (i.e. God or Gods) is understood to be Creator (in the sense of fashioner or even architect), but not Originator or Source of all existence. Reality exists in some indescribable way (or in a way that is describable only by analogy), and the Creator God resides *within* it. A part of that reality which exists independently of that God's creative effort is that undifferentiated ('formless') "stuff" which God orders (i.e. into which s/he introduces differentiation, discreteness and regularity) so as to form or 'create' the universe. Perhaps without exception, the personified divine is, in ancient myth, a demiurge.

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(This is certainly, however, to oversimplify, and we shall return to this topic in a later chapter.²)

Conversely, Judeo-Christian tradition features a concept of divinity which differs markedly from that described above: in it, God is presented as both personified and as being the sole Source of all reality as such. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation from or out of nothing) has been maintained nearly universally within this tradition over the course of its history (with the exception of a few Medieval Jewish philosophers, such as Nachmonides, and a smattering of Christian thinkers deemed heretical in their time). This tradition (as well as its spiritual progeny, the religion of Islam) maintains that for God truly to be God, there must be no existence, substance, or reality of which He is not the generator. God is the creator of absolutely *everything*. Were it otherwise (that is, were God to build the universe out of the 'building blocks' of any substance, proto-matter or 'stuff' that He did not make), God would simply not be God, as He would not be *Absolute*. To be Absolute is to be the Author of all that exists, to be the Creator of Reality as such.

Now, all of this may not seem so important or troubling to the ordinary believer, but from the earliest days of Jewish and Christian theological inquiry, thinkers have recognized that it is essential to establish the Absolute nature of God: if God is not seen to be Absolute, then He exists within a Reality that contains something He did not make; if there is something He did not make, then we might ask who, in fact, made it. Moreover, if there is an aspect of Reality that God did not make, then it is impossible to say that it is God Who is responsible for the existence of Reality itself: God would be an item existing within a Reality of which He is not the Creator—and the question would then be: Who, in fact, made that Reality? Who made God?

² This is a gross oversimplification, to be sure. In point of fact, there is nearly always discernible, in ancient mythologies, a Deity whose role it is to be the Original Father or Mother of all that is, or otherwise to exist as the ground of all Being. However, that God(dess) is usually remote and unreachable – somehow 'retired from service,' if you will, and the creator god function served by a lesser deity.

It is important to note that the Bible itself – the text of Genesis 1:1 – **nowhere says that God created the world from out of nothing**. This is a doctrine which has grown up within Judaism as it developed and which was taken up by Christianity. It is but one possible interpretation of the actual words of Genesis. But it is an important interpretation. For the doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation explicitly rejects the notion that anything exists which is not the product of God's creative function; it insists that God is the supreme Source of all Reality. The doctrine of *ex nihilo* creation vouchsafes the Absolute and Omnipotent nature of God.

But we have already understood that our minds simply cannot conceive of what it would mean to say that God made the universe without the use of any sort of cosmic 'raw material' from which to form it. Try as we might to get around this simple fact, it is nonetheless true that to say that someone made something *means* that s/he made it *out of* something. If we, then, insist that God did not form the universe out of any cosmic 'raw material,' if we maintain the He did not find primordial cosmic 'stuff' and build the world from it, we proclaim a God Who is 'all in all,' a God Who is Absolute and Omnipotent. But if we do so, we also are proclaiming that all that which exists is in its being a part of God – God is the One real substance, and God is not other than His creation (that is, His creation is part of Him). God's Being exceeds His creation, to be sure, but part of God is what we would call His finite creation.

Now, the text of Genesis 1:1 can be read in three distinct ways: (1) **Separation**. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth – with everything narrated in the rest of the account as a telling of how, in fact, He went about doing it. This is to say, there was in existence nothing but God (i.e. God's being or existence exhausted the category of existence itself). After he had made the heavens and the earth (in their preliminary forms), there existed a chaotic, formless 'stuff,' an existence which was now apart from and other than God. This means that all that exists that is Not-God was originally a part of God's own Substance ("God-stuff," so to speak) that God separated off from Himself in the act of creation.[And in fact, the original Hebrew word for 'create,' *Bara*, carries this sense of division or

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separating off.] The act of creation is, in fact, the formation of the universe of multiplicity and differentiation that we all know and love by way of God's *giving of Himself*: God is Being or Reality itself (there is no other Reality over Him or within which He exists); the creation of the finite universe is simply God's own dividing of His Unity into limited and finite forms distinct from His Godhead.

(2) **Ex Nihilo.** In the beginning, etc.: God fashioned the world (the created universe of things other than God) from nothing at all – not from His own Being or Substance (“God-stuff”) and not from any substance or ‘stuff’ other than He which He somehow ‘finds.’ While this is the traditional way of speaking about the creation, and while this expression of (*ex nihilo*) creation from nothing easily rolls off the tongue, we must find that it is at best a shorthand for something else or at worst a statement without meaning. I would indeed argue that in fact our option number 2 dissolves into option number 1: to say that God made many things (the universe of multiplicity) from no ‘raw material’ at all, and that God, as Absolute, is, before this fact, Reality or Being itself, is precisely to say that all that which God made He made out of the substance of Reality itself, namely Himself. The universe is brought into existence through God's separation of part of Himself (part of His Reality, His Substance) from the rest of Himself. The universe is part of the infinite God rendered finite, other, and multiple.³

(3) **Demiurgical.** “In the Beginning (when) God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep.” God fashioned the finite, created universe out of the raw material of chaotic, unformed ‘stuff’ (proto-matter or prime matter) which He did not create and which He found. Thus, God ‘created’ the world insofar as He gave order to that undifferentiated substance which He found

before Him, but He did not create that proto-substance Himself. This option of interpretation of the Biblical text has the virtue of assuring us of **God's Transcendence and distinctness from His creation** (the world is not a part of God), of **God's complete Perfection** (He contains nothing subject to generation, change or decay within Him, and He contains or causes no evil), and **the robust and true reality of the things within the created order** (the physical world is not illusion or Maya, and the immortality of the soul is personal and individual: we do not dissolve into the Unity of the All when we die). However, this option renders God less than Absolute and less than Omnipotent – there is something that He did not create, namely the very proto-matter or undifferentiated substance that He needed to form the world! On this interpretation, God is a craftsman, rather than the Supreme Source of all being. And even more troubling is the fact that this understanding of the creation leaves us with a serious problem: if God needed an infinite, unformed Other or substance (that which is truly without any form [limitation] whatsoever is infinite) out of which to build the universe, then God is not the only Infinite or Absolute substance there is. Why is this a problem? Simply because that Other, as uncreated by God, would have to be self-caused (as is God) and thus Infinite, Absolute, etc. How can two distinct substances both be Absolute (Absolute means that the substance in question is Being or Reality *itself*, the Source and Cause of all other reality). It would indeed seem that Form and the Formable need each other for the universe of finite reality to come into being at all (it is the union of Form (order) and that which takes form that makes the world). It would also seem that as Absolute, God cannot simply be a thing among things within being (Reality) – and we must see the unformed substance which God orders also to be infinitely Absolute, such that it, as not a product of God, cannot simply be an aspect of God's creation.

Tradition holds that God is what is called a ‘simple unity’ – that is, God, as perfect, contains no imperfection within His substance or Being. Like the perishable matter to which they give rise, change, motion and limitation (all the things that

³ This line of thought is, in fact, operative in the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah (though it is generally conceived more in terms of the spatial metaphor of God's making a space or a ‘hole’ within His own Being or Substance so as to enable the emanation from Himself of all that which is other than Himself.

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go to form the universe of finite creation) are imperfect, because they are impermanent, subject to generation and decay. God can, it is said, contain no limitation, no decay, no mortality, no degeneration. So God can contain no multiplicity, no difference. Yet this same tradition also holds that God (as utterly immaterial, omniscient, and the Source of all order) is Pure Thought. And all thought essentially involves difference, distinction, multiplicity, motion. This is explained by traditional theologians by way of saying that while all this is true, it is different in the case of God! But despite this assertion, the fact remains that if God is Thinking, if God's essence is that of Pure immaterial, universal Mind and Thought, God's essence involves essentially that which is different (i.e. Other) than Himself. In their very assertion that God contains the multiplicity and motion of thought and reason, traditional Christian theologians such as Thomas Aquinas laid bare the fact that, contrary to their own assertion, God is much more than a simple unity. As Infinite, God is not a totality comprised of parts (as all totalities are, by definition, finite). Yet God may be easily seen to 'contain' difference (multiplicity, otherness) within Himself.

Now, we only have a philosophical problem with our option number 1 if we continue to understand God in His Absoluteness as a Simple Substance which in no wise contains difference or differentiation. If God is a Simple Unity, then all created multiplicity is, in fact, unreal, the world and our very selves an illusion. All, in the end, dissolves into the only true reality there is, God Himself. (On a simple and arguably unreflective interpretation, this is precisely what the Eastern philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism espouse: the Absolute nature of God is bought, so to speak, at the expense of the robust reality of the differentiated world.⁴) Yet, our experience tells us that we are real, we are not an illusion. The world is real; the things that exist in the universe, and the universe of space and time and planets and stars – all that which exists other than God – are all really real. But if their reality means that they are born of a substance (a 'stuff') distinct from God, then God could not have made

that substance (for if He did, God, as Absolute Substance, would simply be separating off part of His own substance in the making, and not creating a substance other than His own). Yet, if we move in the other direction (as we have already seen), and insist upon the reality of the many things comprising the world other than God, we find that our conception of God is no longer that of the Absolute. What is the solution to this conundrum?

It seems apparent that we might best understand the thrust of Genesis 1:1 to be the paradoxical statement that God, properly so-called, includes Spirit (Mind, Pure Thought, Order) *as well as* its Other (the Formable); God's Unity is an Interaction of Unity and Difference: God, though One, contains difference within Himself.

The story of the six days of creation illustrate for us the progressive development of multiplicity (the universe is comprised of many, many things, and reality contains more individual items than God alone). After the heavens and the earth are created, God speaks things into existence by way of a continual separation of things from one into two. The universe is binary, created as the complimentary co-existence of opposites. Light is formed by God's speaking the division from the darkness of the chaos. Waters below are separated from the waters above, thus producing both the sky with its rain and the oceans with their waters. Land and ocean are separated one from the other, yielding the distinctness of the earth's habitats. And so it goes, from division comes opposites, complementarity. From these binary divisions, God has created many kinds of things. And with each further act of division, the things created increase in complexity, and with each increase in complexity, the things created are further removed from the primordial state of unformed and undifferentiated chaos.

Now, we may note that when God's universe has become sufficiently complex so as to be at the point at which many kinds of the same basic items are to be created, God gives the earth (Nature, that which was at the first the Chaotic and Primordial Other to be ordered) the power to continue the process of creative division on its own. This is to say that when the basics of the world have been laid out, and each genus and the various species within each genus brought into existence, the

⁴ Yet another oversimplification, though useful as far as it goes, and handy for our present purpose of illustration.

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individuals within each species are no longer directly spoken into being by God, but this process of further complexification of the world is the result of Nature's bringing forth individual life. The ordering has been done, and Nature – that substance initially separated off from the Godhead at the Beginning – begins its role as the force of life and birth.

This 'giving over of power' from God to Nature is significant in two ways. First, it signals the fact that God (the Godhead) is the force of Order. Secondly, it tells us that the complexity which creation has assumed has led it further away from both its unformed existence and from God's direct ordering Power. The more complex the world becomes, the more delimited are its contents; the more complex the world becomes, the more *independent* are its creatures. The creatures of the created order are quite individual and distinct from God. Their existence is quite real and no illusion. Differentiation and multiplicity have come to full fruition.

Bearing in mind the traditional understanding of God as a Simple and Absolute Unity (i.e. God is Simple, Immaterial Substance, subject neither to motion, change, generation or decay), we might declare God's 'Other' to be Multiplicity, the Principle of Differentiation (the principle whereby the universe comes to consist of many things, rather than monolithic unity). However, in making this assumption, we are immediately beset with a problem. God is also traditionally held to be the Principle of Order in the universe; it is God who creates by ordering the undifferentiated Chaos into a *world* ("The earth was without form and void"), comprised of discrete objects operating in a regular order. Now, to be the Source of all Order, God would, as we have seen, have to 'contain' or include elements of difference (such as ideas, structure, logic, etc., and the ideal array of possible universes and existents from which God, in His creative capacity, has chosen.). In short, in order to *give* order, God must *contain* Order – and thus not be a Simple Substance. Yet, God also *must* exist as Simple Substance or Unity, for it is also true that differentiation necessarily implies finitude and precludes infinity (differentiation or multiplicity requires limitation: to be an object, a thing is by definition *finite*) – and we have already seen that truly to be the Source of all being, God must be

seen to be Being or Reality itself, and thus to be Infinite.

We indeed seem to have hit a brick wall in our reasoning – we have come up against an insurmountable logical Paradox. Not only have we found that God must be both Simple Substance and Multiplicity (Difference), but we have found that when we try conceptually to separate God into two complimentary aspects of Orderer and That-Which-Is-Ordered, our Paradox reasserts itself. If God Himself is Simple Unity, admitting of no differentiation, and that which God orders is Chaos in the sense of undifferentiated substance upon which order is imposed, we are hard-pressed to account for the fact that Order, which integrally and by definition involves the categories of difference and multiplicity, must, upon this model, be held to stem from – and thus to be contained within – Absolute Unity. Conversely, were we therefore to dispense with the traditional understanding of God (that is, the *Godhead*) as the Source of Order, pointing instead to *Chaos* (or orderable substance) as the primordial seat of differentiation and individuation, we are left in a similar logical bind: such a conception would result in nothing less than the assertion that the Undifferentiated *contains* differentiation (order). This solution, too, is clearly impossible.

Substance is either undifferentiated (amorphous, unformed) or it is not. The notion of creating or 'making' clearly requires substance out of which that which is created is made (be it God's own Substance, as we have maintained, or something else). Thus, we can see that the simple impulse to understand the Nature of God as somehow neatly divided into Godhead (Ordering Creator) and Unformed Substance (admitting the differentiation resulting from God's creative imposition of Order upon it) is, in fact, too simple to be true – and too Paradoxical ultimately to be coherent. While logic, in combination with a close reading of the text in the first part of our analysis of the Creation Story of Genesis showed that the most coherent way to envisage God and God's creation of the physical universe was to construe the unformed substance acted upon by God as an aspect of God which God separates off from Himself, we are now likewise led to understand that it will in no wise do to posit a 'binary' God who is one-half Order and Spiritual Self-Identity

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(Unity) and one-half Chaotic, formable Substance. The universe of discrete objects – the universe in which we live – is indeed the union of substance and form, Order and that-which-is-made-orderly. Yet, just as our initial exploration suggested that it is in fact impossible to consider God’s creation of the universe to be the mere ‘zapping into existence’ the furniture of the world *ex nihilo* in the sense of ordering without a substantial substratum, we now find that the very unformed (void or Chaotic) nature of this substratum renders it, though numerically distinct from God, likewise an Absolute Unity. (We would do well to recall here our earlier observation that it is logically impossible to assert the reality of more than one Substance said to be Absolute (Infinite), as to claim Infinity for a substance is to proclaim its complete unboundedness – it is Unlimited. The existence of two Unlimited Principles or Substances, of course, would be an utter impossibility, as their very coexistence would render them limited, each by the other. Thus, we have seen from yet another angle altogether, the need to understand God in a way that not only recognizes God’s nature as Spirit and Principle of Order, but likewise as the Substantial reality underlying the universe of God’s creation – the ‘Other’ ordered by God which is in part manifested by measurable energy, matter, and the physical universe.)

I suggest that this Paradox is a *revealing* of the Nature and Reality of God. Once again, the limits of our logic and our concepts (rather than merely of our knowledge) are made manifest. God, as no mere entity existing *within* reality, is revealed as Reality itself (St. Paul, understanding this, tells us that it is in God that we “live and move and have our being”): for God to be Absolute, there must be no Reality beyond or ‘outside’ God. Therefore, to conceive of God as Pure and Self-same Identity (Simple Unity) is to deny the existence of multiplicity, or at the very least, to deem the world of individual and varied objects illusory. Not only does our experience (of our own reality, as well as that of the world that surrounds us) inform us that multiplicity and differentiation are real, but likewise, our logic dictates that for even an *illusory* multiplicity to exist, God would have to contain difference within Himself, and be other than Pure and Self-same Identity. God as Supreme Subject and God as Objects formed can be seen to

be two aspects of a God Who is somehow uniquely One, though neither of the ‘two sides’ of God (Self-Identical Godhead and Unformed Substance), may be said unilaterally to be defined by either Pure Identity or Pure Difference.

Ancient Greek Philosophers questioned the source of identity and difference: how can two things be said to be the same (kind of thing), while yet remaining numerically different? Since no two numerically different things are absolutely identical, in what does their difference lie, and to what can attribute it? Philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, searched for the *principium individuationis* -- the individuating principle. If all items of the same kind are identical, being made individual only by their instantiation in different matter, then we say that the *principium individuationis* is matter – it is matter that accounts for the individual difference of the object. If, however, we remember that without form, matter is a mode of undifferentiated substance (Chaos), we are unable to account for the differences obtaining among things by appeal to the difference in their matter (as all matter is, by definition, absolutely the same). The fact, then, that there is both numerical and qualitative difference obtaining between items otherwise identical must, it would seem, be attributable to a difference in their form (that is, their *kind*, or the *idea* by which they derive their nature). Yet, upon examination, we find that this, too, leads us into a dead-end: ideas (forms, kinds, concepts) are, by definition, general and shared – they are universals. A form or an idea is shared by all items of the same type. The form (i.e. the concept) or idea is what such items have in common, and the means by which we are able to understand the world around us through the *identification* of its components. We may even go so far as to say that any effort to characterize a particular object of thought ends in failure, as each idea or term by which we render our description more specific remains inextricably tied to the universal: there is no description or cognition possible of a thing or quality which is utterly unique – the individuality (or, we might say, the *existence*) of each and every object of thought or inquiry remains forever beyond our grasp, slipping through the gaps of our every effort to ‘capture’ it in our concepts, which,

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by their nature, must always remain general and shared⁵.

The existence of the items comprising the universe of multiplicity, then – the existence of individuals – cannot be traced entirely to the Principle of Formable Substance (matter, or that which manifests itself in part as matter), any more than it can be said to be the sole product of Order. It is in the interplay – the interaction – of Order and the Unformed that the finite world comes to be⁶. Yet what is fascinating about our attempt to understand this reality and interaction is its ability to continue to elude and to exceed our conceptual grasp. For we see that the structure of Order [ideas, kinds, natural laws, laws of logic, and even the realm of potentialities], being a structure of multiplicities, involves difference, but that it likewise, involves identity, insofar as each and every concept or idea is a universal, through which individual items share a commonality (an identification). The Chaotic substance logically presumed to be the substratum of all individual existents or creation, conversely, though seemingly disordered and the means by which multiple existents are born, integrally involves *identity* as well as difference. For it is precisely insofar as it is without Order (chaotic, unformed) that it is an Absolute, unlimited and monolithic Unity.

We recall that in Genesis 1:1, the creation of the universe is begun by the division or separation from God of an aspect of God which is Other – it is part of God that is informed by Order. It cannot be otherwise; there is no Reality ‘beyond’ or independent of God. Are we to say, then (as theologians and philosophers through the ages have resisted saying) that God contains matter? Are we to believe that there is within God that which is perishable, mutable, and subject to generation and decay? Jewish, Christian and

Muslim theologians (as well as philosophers and theologians of nearly every other religious persuasion) have refused to make such a claim precisely because to characterize God as in any way material is to attribute limitation to God (and thus to deny God’s Absolute nature, which must include Infinity). Yet, we also must recall that the problem of Identity and Difference, as it relates to both God and the universe, extends beyond the mere category of matter: to attribute the fact of multiplicity in the world to matter is to neglect to address the fact that it is difference within God (the differences fundamental to God as Thinking and Ordering Force) and not just the physical universe that concerns us. ‘Defining’ God as in some way both One (Godhead) and Many (ideal and physical particularity) is not to fall prey to pantheism or any other sort of reduction of God (Absolute Being or Reality Itself) to matter or the material – for God to be God (and for God to be construed in such a way that there is no Reality independent of God), we must understand the Principle of Difference as rather a fundamental aspect of God which is necessary for the manifestation of materiality (an aspect of difference). God, as Supreme Subjectivity (the Primary and Originating “I”) is Self-Identical; God, as Intelligent (i.e. Omniscient), and Ordering, contains that which is Different from His Godhead (the ‘object,’ so to speak, of God’s Subjective consciousness).

While we cannot merely reduce God to a binary nature (Orderer and Ordered), we can see that God’s Ultimate Unity integrally involves both God-Identity and Otherness. Identity cannot be thought in isolation from the concept of Difference, and likewise, difference depends for its very nature upon the reality of Identity (as the particulars of Difference require Identity in order to be what they are). God is One (God is Being Itself), but God’s Unity cannot logically be conceived after the manner of finite unities⁷. God’s is not a Unity of a closed totality (which would, of necessity, be finite and involve limit), but of Infinity. Matter (so-called Prime Matter), as well as the physical universe, must be seen as themselves *manifestations of the interactive union*

⁵ This is as well the ontological insight of Theodor W. Adorno, which is discussed at length in his *Negative Dialectics* and “Subject and Object.”

⁶ For a fascinating statement of this point, see Plato’s dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist* – the dialogues in which he refutes the famous Theory of Forms which has traditionally been taken as his own and proposes an onto-epistemological understanding wherein Sameness and Difference are both viewed to be necessary, real, and mutually interdependent.

⁷ It is Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas who first drew this important distinction between totality and Infinity.

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of what we may term Order and Chaos, Identity and Difference, contained within God. Whereas pantheism involves the limitation of God to the determinations of physicality and finite totality, the brand of panentheism resulting from a careful and logical analysis of the implications of the basic ontology of the Book of Genesis leads us, I contend, to a view of God which no longer tries to make of God an object or view God as a being *among* beings (and thus limited). To characterize Ultimate Reality as ultimately an interdependent and interactive Union between Subjectivity and Objectivity, Identity and Difference is to focus not only (as our tradition has plainly and in the main, always done) upon God as Subjective (i.e. Personal), but to give coherent and true credence to the notion that God is actually Infinite; God is Being or Reality itself.

Our concepts cannot 'capture' God, but can indeed lead us to the point at which we can indicate – and experience – something of the meaning of Infinity: God is Unity insofar as God is Reality Itself, God's Subjectivity is an Identity in perpetual relation with God's Multiplicity (or 'objectivity') in endless dialectical interplay. God's Unity is a Unity beyond all unity of finite totality, and (God's Difference being necessary to God's very Identity), a Unity which both requires and vouchsafes all particularity. Each 'aspect' of God contains its 'opposite,' in order to be that which it is – the very same insight which leads Eastern thought to conceive of Ultimate Reality through the symbol of the Yin and Yang – mutually dependent terms of opposing force or import, each existing only by way of containing within themselves a small aspect of that other to which it exists in dialectical and complimentary opposition.

It is this idea of God as a non-totalizing and Infinite Unity of opposites in interaction which will serve as the basis for our exploration of the Feminine Aspect of the Divine in Genesis and Goddess Theology, which we will undertake in Essay #4.

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October, 2006